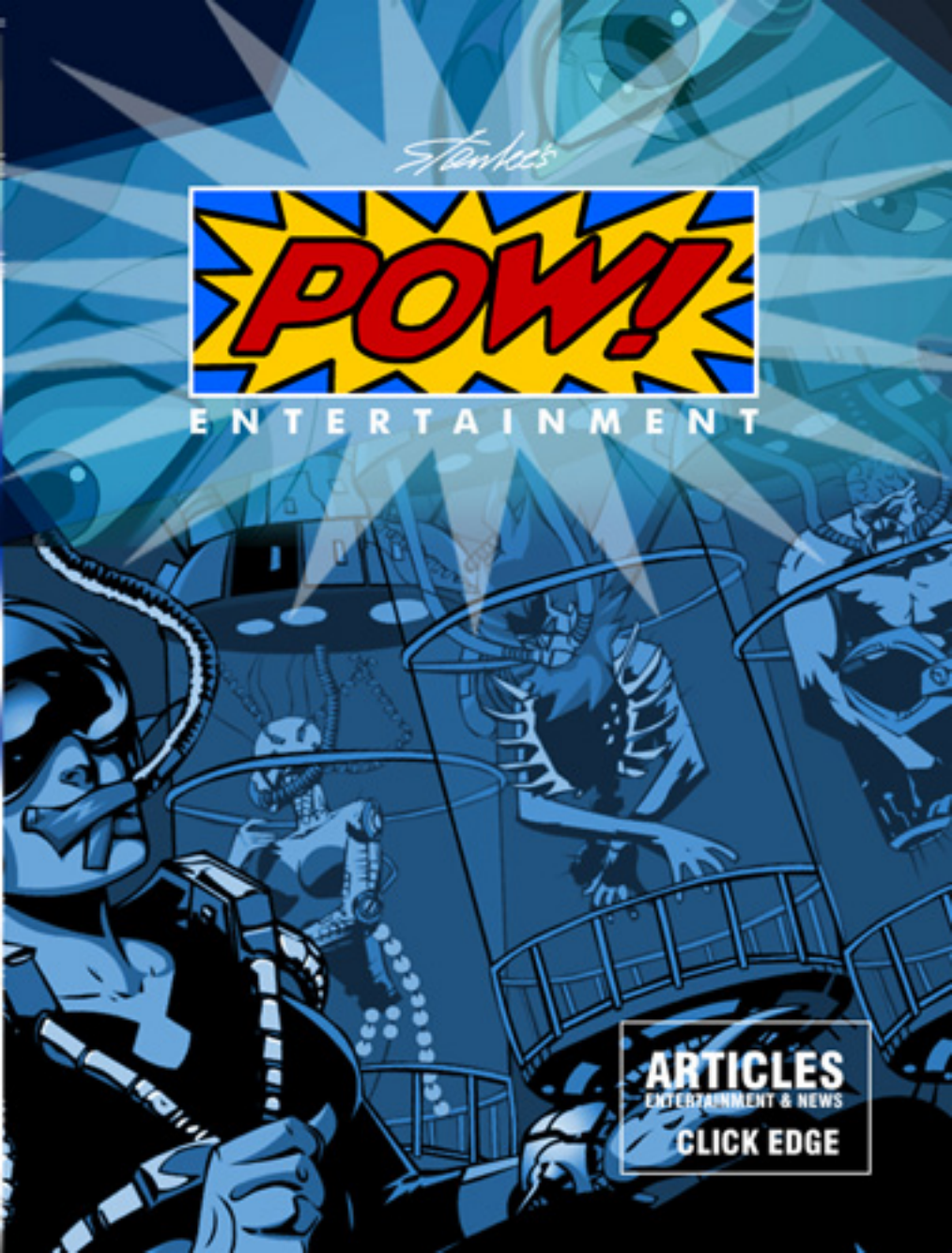
Stan Lee's
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LEGENDS & GROUNDBREAKERS

Stan Lee

Stan Lee Neil Wards/Getty Images

A MARVEL OF THE AGES

Lee's comicbook revolution still resonates in print and on screen

By Brian Lowry

The term "revolutionary" gets thrown around too cavalierly in cultural discussions. Yet despite Stan Lee's renowned fondness for hyperbole, that's precisely what Marvel Comics achieved in the1960s, inaugurating a brand of four-color storytelling that leapt off comicbook pages and eventually onto movie and TV screens. In those years, Lee and the Marvel bullpen invited a generation of kids,teens and young men to feel as if they belonged to what he cheekily dubbed "the Merry Marvel Marching Society," establishing a rapport with readers who somehow came to feel they were part of the gang.

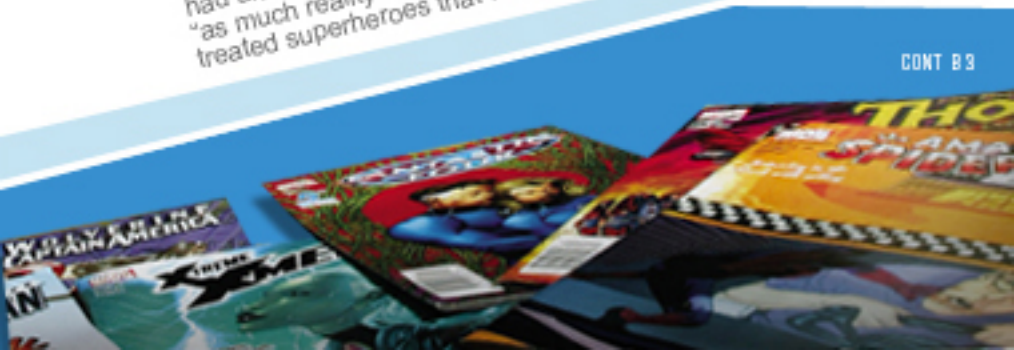
OLD FRIENDS: *Stan Lee catches up with the Marvel Comics characters he co-created in the1960s in such comicbooks as, at right, Fantastic Four #48, X-Men #1 and Amazing Fantasy #15. due to Lee's workload, he dispensed with the standard detailed*

Director Reginald Hudlin, one of many current filmmakers weaned onthe Marvel universe, likens Lee's achievement as the company's editor and writer — teaming with artists such as "Spider-Man's" Steve Ditko and particularly Jack Kirby — to the Beatles' impact on popular music. "Look, how long was the Beatles' career really?" Hudlin says. "A group of people gets together, and they bang out a body of work that resonates for decades."

From 1961-65, within theera known as the Silver Age of comics, Marvel delivered a dazzling assortment of characters that would pass into the cultural lexicon: Spider-Man, the Hulk, the Avengers, Iron Man, the X-Men, Thor and, first and foremost, the Fantastic Four.

As Jordan Raphael and Tom Spurgeon note in the book "Stan Lee, and the Rise and Fall of the AmericanComic Book," during that window "a universe ofpop culture was brought to life on Jack Kirby's drawing table," sparking nothing less than a comicbook revolution. Recalling that period, Lee says, "It was like we couldn't do anything wrong. We just made comics different than they had always been," juxtaposing wild fantasy elements with "as much reality as I could put in thestories. Nobody had treated superheroes that way before."

CONT B3



Part of the shift was logistical. Under a system born largely out of necessity due to Lee's workload, he dispensed with the standard detailed scripts and presented illustrators a synopsis that allowed them to construct pages — and fully bring their storytelling skills to bear — with Lee adding dialogue later. This afforded Kirby and Ditko what Spurgeon and Raphael describe as "incredibly wide latitude" by changing the way writers and artists collaborated.

The more significant innovation, however, was stylistic, as Marvel characters grappled with personal foibles that related to the comics audience in a different way, attracting more sophisticated readers. The Fantastic Four bickered, the Hulk was tormented, and Spider-Man and the mutant X-Men constantly wrestled with teen angst, including feelings of being different — a highly identifiable problem, as anyone visiting a comicbook convention can attest.

"Marvel took what the standard superhero concept was and put it on its head," says Sam Register, senior VP of original animation at Cartoon Network. "Marvel took comics out of the hands of just kids and started putting them in the hands of older kids and young adults. ... When the guys in the ties step back and let creators be creative, wonderful things happen."

Lee thus instilled Marvel with a cool factor that made kids feel smart while enticing young adults. He resisted the temptation to talk down to readers and evoked the sense of a fun-loving Marvel gang (down to nicknames like Smilin' Stan and Jolly Jack) — an affable extended fraternity, in stark contrast to DC Comics' more staid stable of heroes.

"Stan's revolutionary breakthrough was to introduce complex psychology to comics," Hudlin says. "If Superman was our ideal, Spider-Man was all of our neuroses."

Long treated shabbily by Hollywood, the superhero genre changed significantly with Tim Burton's 1989 adaptation of DC Comics' "Batman," departing from the campy TV version that defined the character in the 1960s. Technological advances have since offered the ability to bring what were once cost-prohibitive concepts to the screen, though computer wizardry hasn't always solved the matter of breathing life into characters in a manner that pleases the

masses without alienating the faithful.

A less tangible aspect of Marvel's matriculation beyond the printed page involves its influence on filmmakers and studio execs that feel an abiding passion for comics, causing them to seep into other popular entertainment beyond the direct adaptations. In addition to Hudlin, directors such as Kevin Smith, Quentin Tarantino and Chris Columbus have cited Marvel as a source of creative inspiration, as has "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" creator Joss Whedon.

Lee's own personality, too, is a central part of this legacy. Even after his hands-on role diminished, he remained an ambassador for the comics industry, touring college campuses and carrying the message that reading them needn't be a closeted pastime.

Having seen Marvel titles mangled in the past, the success of "Spider-Man" and its sequel represent perhaps the ultimate validation of Marvel as cultural touchstone. Aficionados, in fact, will notice various images transplanted almost directly from the comics into the latest film — including Peter Parker walking away from his discarded costume, approximating issue No. 50 of "The Amazing Spider-Man," published in 1967. Director Sam Raimi was 7 years old.

"You can imagine how gratifying that is," says Lee, adding in regard to being compared to the Beatles, "They were pretty good, too."

Keeping the faith

Classic comicbook tales at heart of 'Spider-Man 2'

ADAPTATION: Elements of "Spider-Man 2," such as the origin of Doctor Octopus, above, or Peter Parker throwing out his costume, below, were adapted directly from Stan Lee's 1960s Marvel stories.

Spider-Man 2" slung a solid web around worldwide audiences, but if you're looking for the true secret behind Spidey's soul and success, look no further than the colorful pages written by the Shakespeare of superheroes: Spider-Man Man co-creator Stan Lee.

More than 40 years after Spider-Man's first appearance, Lee shares a "story by" credit in both "Spider-Man" films for having cocreated the character with comics artist Steve Ditko. "One of things I'm most proud of," Lee says, "is that in these two movies, virtually every element is taken from elements in stories that I had written."

Lee's tale of Peter Parker quitting his web-slinging gig, which became the sequel's backbone, originally appeared 37 years ago in "Amazing Spider-Man No. 50, "Spidey No More!" One of Lee's favorite stories, it depicted a frustrated Parker dumping his Spidey costume into a trash can and walking away — just as in the film.

"Frankly, I wasn't thinking of any of these stories ending up on the screen, but if anybody had asked me at that time if we were going to film something that would make a great arc, I would have chosen this story," Lee says. "It seems to me that when you take something as far-fetched as a superhero and you put him in a realistic situation that anybody can relate to, that's the best thing you can do in a fantasy story."

"Spider-Man 2" producer and chairman-CEO of Marvel Studios Avi Arad agrees. "The thing I learned the most from Stan," he says, "is that it's all about the characters. His characters are conflicted, yet kind, and his heroes are reluctant and flawed, and that's why they endure the test of time. They're human, and there's a lot of Stan in Peter Parker."

Many of Lee's classic villains, like Doc Ock, also have human origins. "I remembered somewhere I had seen a picture of a scientist who was working on some radioactive material and had a big glass between him and the radiation," Lee says. "And he worked with these tentacles that went through the glass, so I thought, 'Wouldn't it be fun if some accident caused those metal tentacles to be grafted onto the body of the scientist?'"

Over the years the popular Spider-Man character had been adapted a few times as an animated series and once as a live-action TV skein, but Lee insists Spidey wasn't done right for live action until director Sam Raimi elevated the property by taking it seriously.
"Everything depends on how you do it," Lee says. "I think anything, any kind of a story can be successful when it's told the right way — and the greatest plot in the world can end up a bomb if it's told the wrong way. Everything depends on how you do it. How you write it. How you film it." There was some creative tension during the early development of "Spider-Man" when Arad and Raimi revived an idea from a previous James Cameron treatment that reimagined Spider-Man's webbing as organic, rather than manufactured, as it is in the comic.

"We felt that when you get bitten by a spider if you get special powers, they should be complete," Arad says. They argued that if Parker could invent such web cartridges, he'd probably abandon crimefighting for a CEO position at 3M.

Lee countered that Parker would never get too rich to care, but Lee finally embraced the idea after seeing a rough cut. "It's one of the rare cases since the world began where I was wrong," Lee says laughing.

Lee's creative juices are currently flowing into setting up TV and film projects for his new company, POW! Entertainment. As for Spidey's future? "If he's done right, he'll go on forever," Lee says.

"Look at Tarzan, look at James Bond. I learned what I've always known: If somebody
takes a good property and does it as well as it should be done, it's going to turn out to be a hit."

Lee bounces back into business with POW!

By ANTHONY
D'ALESSANDRO

There comes a point in a lot of comicbook stories when the superhero loses his or her powers, then miraculously gains them back.

As such, it comes as no surprise that Stan Lee is back in business with another shingle, POW! Entertainment, after previous venture Stan Lee Media collapsed in the wake of the dotcom crash and an insider-trading scandal.

Rather than buckling from the financial trauma, Lee had the strength of the Hulk to keep him going in his early 80s. Soon after SLM folded, Lee (who was exonerated of any wrongdoing) sought to solidify his reputation as an entrepreneur and invested his money along with Arthur Lieberman and former SLM topper Gill Champion to form POW!

"I just want to show that I can succeed. I'm currently working with people who are honorable and competent. Most of all, I love the work," says Lee. "Some people retire so that they can finally do what they want, such as playing golf. Well, I'm doing what I want to do. It gives me double satisfaction to see that the things I'm doing are meeting with favor. That's the biggest rush."

POW!'s creative strategy harks back to the comicbook guru's grassroots of inventing character franchises that can spread across several media. If that m.o. sounds similar to
SLM's, POW!'s advantage over its predecessor is that it's laying off risk; employing a skeletal staff; and outsourcing a bulk of its DVD distribution and production ops through minority shareholder IDT Entertainment, which owns Anchor Bay DVD.

Like other startups during the dot-com boom, SLM invested a tremendous amount of money in itself, burning through $26 million in operating expenses from its inception in October 1998 through September 2000, with only $1 million in revenue to show. The company boasted its own internal digital studio as well as a hearty workforce of 140. Initially, SLM's heroic epics, such as "7th Portal," were to be developed as online series.

"Both Stan and I never felt that the Internet was the medium to introduce his new franchises," says POW! prexy-chief operating officer Champion. "Stan's stories are complex and character-driven, and need time and space to be developed."

In the same fashion that Marvel is harnessing top-notch Hollywood talent to bring Lee's comicbook personalities to the screen, POW! (which Lee quips

stands for Purveyors of Wonder) is forging several relationships to breathe life into the scribe's latest musings. Those projects brewing at POW! include:

• "Who Wants to Be a Superhero," a reality TV skein produced in conjunction with reality vet Bruce Nash ("Meet My Folks") in the vein of "American Idol" where candidates pitch their superhero personalities to a panel of judges. Winners receive advice from Lee and are thrown into a real-life situation where they can strut their heroic stuff.

• "Hef's Superbunnies," POW!'s second satirical animated television skein set around a personality after Pamela Anderson's role in "Stan Lee's Stripperella." "Bunnies" is Playboy founder Hugh Hefner's "real life" story as a master crimefighter and his lovely sidekicks.

•"Nick Ratchet," a custom-tailored screen character created for Pierce Brosnan, where he plays a true-to-life superhero.

• ibooks, This October, ibooks through HarperCollins will publish Lee's first youngreader picture book, "Superhero Christmas," about a heroic family who sets out to rescue Santa from the evil Ice King. POW! is planning to turn the book into an animated pic.

Yet, what makes all these projects dynamic is Lee's creative force behind them. And like the old days, the comicbook scribe still applies the same ethos in his daily brainstorming.
"Like my old characters, the new ones I create must be believable, empathetic, romantic and have an element of humor — not some cliche," he says.

CHAMPION

"STAN LEE HAS EARNED HIS PLACE AS AN INNOVATOR AND SHOWMAN PAR EXCELLENCE - THE P.T. BARNUM OF THE COMIC-BOOK INDUSTRY - WHO HAS ENTERTAINED HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF FANS WORLDWIDE FOR OVER THREE GENERATIONS."

EXCERPTED FROM THE INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 2 OF THE COLLECTED EDITION OF THE DC COMICS SERIES:
JUST IMAGINE STAN LEE CREATING THE DC UNIVERSE

CONGRATS TO

STAN LEE

MY IDOL. MY MENTOR. MY FRIEND.

MICHAEL USLAN,
BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT LLC

Patience pays off for Marvel films

By MICHAEL MALLORY

Even though Marvel Comics-related film properties have been around for 60 years, there is no doubt that this very moment represents the Golden Age of Marvel in the media.

"We have a whole generation of talented people — writers, directors, cinematographers, studio execs, videogame designers, toy designers — who grew up on comics and were inspired by them," says Avi Arad, chairman-CEO of Marvel Studios.

Arad's dealmaking and producing savvy, combined with advanced digital visual effects, have helped make Marvel the film and TV darling it has long wanted to be.

Marvel's first foray into film, back when the company was known as Timely Comics, was the 1944 Republic serial "Captain America," which cashed in on the name while jettisoning everything about the character creators Joe Simon and Jack Kirby had established three years earlier.

A more accurate Cap, reflecting his mid-1960s renaissance at the hands of Stan Lee and Kirby, returned in 1966 with the mighty Thor, the Sub-Mariner, the Hulk and Iron Man in a low-budget animated series called "The Marvel Super Heroes," which drew heavily from the comics.

"They were basically taking panels from the comicbooks and moving mouths with very little animation," says comic-book writer and historian Peter Sanderson. "You were actually seeing artwork by Jack Kirby and some of the other great artists, and they were Stan's stories."

Even more popular was 1967's slightly more animated "Spider-Man," the theme song for which can still be sung by every baby boomer alive.

In the 1970s, Universal Television produced a series of live-action TV movies-cum-pilots, "Doctor Strange," "Captain America," "Spider-Man" and "The Incredible Hulk." "Spider-Man" and "Hulk" did spawn series, though only the latter, with Bill Bixby and Lou Ferrigno, came close to

pleasing fans of the comics.

"As far as our characters were concerned, 'The Hulk' was the first time that somebody had really gotten it right on film," says Lee. "The 'Spider-Man' TV show was a very shallow representation of Spider-Man. They left out the humor and his personal life, and we had no say about it at the time."

The Hulk returned for a second series of TV movies in the late 1980s, which served as failed pilots for Thor and Daredevil spin-offs.

It was animation that remained the most successful medium for the Marvel Universe through the 1980s and 1990s, offsetting a string of troubled, little-seen productions including 1989's "The Punisher," 1991's "Captain America" and 1993's unreleased "The Fantastic Four."

Although those three misfires were an improvement on the filmic swan dive that was 1986's high-profile "Howard the Duck," an epic disaster that turned the name of Marvel's most atypical hero into a Hollywood metaphor for megabomb.

The golden time for Marvel media really began with Fox TV's faithful, animated series, starting with "X-Men" in 1992 and a CG-enhanced "Spider-Man" series in 1994. The company subsequently gained its theatrical footing with 1998's "Blade," based on a character from "Tomb of Dracula," and 2000's "X-Men," which avoided the trap of trying to include too much of the comicbook saga. With the monumentally successful "Spider-Man" (2002), and now "Spider-Man 2," the Marvel Universe's annexation of Hollywood has been finalized.

With "Hulk" and "Daredevil" having already made their bigscreen appearances, many other Marvel superheroes are waiting in the bullpen, including Iron Man, Captain America and the "official" version of "The Fantastic Four" — the comic series that sparked the big bang of the Marvel Universe in 1961.

Sanderson says one of the things that has changed Marvel's bigscreen fortunes for the better is that today's filmmakers "are taking (the characters) more seriously than

movie people used to."

Obviously, not every character can be expected to achieve Spider-Man levels of success,
but Arad is OK with that. "Different characters can achieve different levels, and still very
good levels," he says, noting: "Spider-Man is unique."

All the best to you Stan
Fondly, Gale Anne Hurd.

MARVEL MOVIES

Excluding the just-released "Spider-Man 2," movies based on Marvel Comics characters have grossed more than $2 billion worldwide.

Title	BOX OFFICE: Domestic	Foreign	Total
Spider-Man	404	418	822
X2	215	191	406
X-Men	157	138	295
Hulk	132	46	178
Daredevil	102	31	133
Blade 2	82	39	121
Blade	70	38	108
The Punisher	34		34*
Howard the Duck	16		16

Figures in millions of $ *$30 in videos

I feel something tingling, and it ain't my Spidey Sense!
If I only had a nickel for every time Kevin said that...
STAN,
Those of us who weren't junior athletes or chick magnets when we were kids have you and your work to thank for keeping us off the ledge.
A good writer can create one memorable character. Only a legend, like you, can create a universe.
A True Believer,

Unique collaborations set Marvel apart

By THOMAS J. McLEAN

He may have been Stan "The Man" Lee, but the Marvel Universe would never have come to be without Jack "King" Kirby, "Sturdy" Steve Ditko and the other writers and artists who breathed life into Marvel's comicbook stories. The unique way they worked with Lee produced some of the best collaborations comics have ever seen, as well as some of its biggest controversies.

Foremost among Lee's collaborators was Kirby, who co-created Captain America in 1941 with his then-partner Joe Simon. When Kirby returned to Marvel without Simon in the late 1950s, he and Lee created most of the early Marvel series including Fantastic Four, Thor, Iron Man, Hulk, X-Men and the Avengers.

"They were able to bring to comics at the time a more intense personality," says Mark Evanier, an animation and comics writer who has worked with both men. "Before Lee and Kirby, a superhero story was about catching the bank robber.

After Lee and Kirby, a superhero story was about what it meant to the people in the story to catch the robber." In the early 1960s, Lee wrote most of the company's comics. To
keep his freelance artists busy, Lee stopped writing full scripts and gave each artist a simple outline — often little more than a spoken idea for a story — that the artists were free to draw however they wished. Lee would then write the dialogue after the story was drawn.

"There are some artists who couldn't do that," Lee says. "Unless they have a script in front of them, they don't know what to do. But all of our artists were visual storytellers and they were just wonderful to collaborate with." Many preferred to work for Lee even though Marvel paid less than some other publishers. "He sent them off feeling very enthused about doing something new," Evanier says. "They didn't operate for him out of fear, as they did for some editors."

Lee was friendly with his artists and became close with Kirby and his family. That didn't extend to Ditko, with whom Lee cooked up Spider-Man and Doctor Strange. "I liked him very much and respected him greatly, but we didn't socialize," Lee says. "He was a little bit reclusive."

When Ditko and Lee clashed in 1966 over a key plot point in Spider-Man, Ditko resigned. Though he continues to produce comics, Ditko has refused to be interviewed
or to discuss his work in public and only a few photographs of him have been published.

Replacing Ditko was John Romita, a romance comics artist who returned to Marvel from DC in 1965 to draw Daredevil. Romita had doubts at first about working in Lee's Marvel style," but found the result very satisfying. Every story I did for him, after he wrote it, it made me prouder than when I did it as a drawing," Romita says.

KIRBY

The same year, Lee took on Roy Thomas, a former schoolteacher who published a comics fan magazine, as an assistant editor and writer. "My job was to pick up the slack as Stan dropped it," Thomas says. "Not just around the office, but in the Marvel Universe."

Lee began to move away from day-to-day writing and editing duties as the company grew through the 1960s and won over new — even influential — fans. Among them were film heavyweights Federico Fellini — who marched down the hall to Lee's office wearing all black followed by a single-file line of identically dressed associates in descending order of height — and Alain Resnais, helmer of "Hiroshima, mon amour," who had Lee write a screenplay for him that was never produced.

As Marvel and Lee got more attention, Kirby began to feel slighted. Kirby left Marvel in 1970 to write, draw and edit his own line of comics for DC, while Lee was promoted to publisher of Marvel in 1972.

Evanier says it was easier for Marvel's owners to say Lee, a company employee, was the driving creative force and the freelance artists were interchangeable.

"Jack, to his dying day, resented the fact that he was not credited as co-creator of those characters," Evanier says. "He was very upset that there was no ongoing financial commitment to his widow and his children."

Evanier says Kirby became more philosophical in his later years, though he and Lee never reconciled. When Kirby died in 1994, Lee attended the funeral and later spoke with Kirby's widow through phone calls arranged by Evanier.

While comics fans continue to hold Kirby in the highest regard, official recognition from Marvel has been limited. Evanier says on the first "X-Men" film, Kirby got "the worst credit ever," being listed in the "producers wish to thank" segment; he received no credit on "X2." On Ang Lee's "Hulk," Lee and Kirby were credited with creating the character in the film's end credits. Lee and Ditko made the opening credits of both "Spider-Man" films.

Since coming to Hollywood in the early 1980s, Lee has made many fans, from James Cameron to Steven Spielberg, though onscreen success eluded Lee and Marvel until the company's current hit streak began with "Blade" and "X-Men." Lee says Marvel's management did not make film and TV a priority until the current leadership, spearheaded by Avi Arad, came to power in the late 1990s.

"As long as he's at the helm, our superheroes and all our characters are in very good hands because he's able to communicate to the writers and directors just who these characters are and how it should be done," Lee says.

STAN'S COMICBOOK VITAE

1922
Stanley Martin Lieber is born Dec. 28 to Jack and Celia Lieber in New York.

1939
Marvel Comics No. 1 is published by Timely Publications, owned by Lieber's cousin-in-law Martin Goodman, and features the first appearances of the Human Torch and Sub-Mariner.

1940
Lieber is hired late in the year by Timely as an assistant to editor Joe Simon and meets Simon's partner, artist Jack Kirby.

1941
Simon and Kirby create Timely's third hit character, Captain America.

Liber's first story, a two-page prose tale, appears in "Captain America Comics" No. 3 under the byline Stan Lee. His first comicbook script, "Headline Hunter, Foreign Correspondent" appears in Captain America Comics No. 5 and runs eight issues.

Simon and Kirby leave Timely late in the year and Goodman puts Lee "temporarily" in charge.

1942
Lee volunteers on Nov. 9 for the Army and serves State-side writing training manuals and films.

1945
Lee returns to Timely as its editor and chief writer.

1947
Lee meets and marries English hat model Joan Boocock.

1950
Stan and Joan's daughter, Joan Celia, is born.

1954
Comics come under attack for supposedly encouraging criminal and delinquent behavior in children by psychiatrist

1954
Comics come under attack for supposedly encouraging criminal and delinquent behavior in children by psychiatrist Fredric Wertham in his book "Seduction of the Innocent." Fearing government regulation after a U.S. Senate inquiry, comics' publishers form the Comics Code Authority, a rating system that banned controversial elements from comicbook stories.

1958
Kirby returns to Timely, now called Atlas, contributing to the company's line of sci-fi and monster comics.

1960
Artist Steve Ditko works regularly with Lee.

1961
Fantastic Four No. 1, by Lee and Kirby, is published, introducing what would become the Marvel Universe.

1962
Sub-Mariner returns in "Fantastic Four" No. 4.

"The Incredible Hulk" No. 1, by Lee and Kirby, is published; the series runs six issues.

Spider-Man appears in "Amazing Fantasy" No. 15 in an 11-page story by Lee and Ditko.

Thor debuts in a Lee and Kirby story in "Journey Into Mystery" No. 83.

1963
Spidey goes solo in "The Amazing Spider-Man" No. 1 by Lee and Ditko, who also team up to introduce Doctor Strange in "Strange Tales" No. 110.

The line officially adopts the name Marvel Comics Group on its covers.

Lee and Kirby come up for Iron Man, in "Tales of Suspense" No. 39; "Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos" No. 1; "The X-Men" No. 1, "The Avengers" No. 1 and pit the Sub-Mariner against the surface world in "Fantastic Four Annual" No. 1.

1964
Lee and Kirby revive Captain America in "The Avengers" No. 4.

Lee and Bill Everett, the original creator of Sub-Mariner, produce "Daredevil" No. 1

1965
Roy Thomas is hired to assist Lee with writing and editing.

Lee begins to lecture at colleges, a practice he would continue into the 1970s.

1966
"The Marvel Super Heroes," an animated show, begins airing in syndication.

The Silver Surfer and Galactus first appear in "Fantastic Four" No. 48, the start of a three-part story that marks the high-point of Lee and Kirby's collaboration.

Ditko resigns from "Amazing Spider-Man" when he disagrees with Lee over the plot. He's replaced as of No. 39 by John Romita.

1967
Lee and Kirby consult on animated Saturday morning ABC-TV shows featuring the Fantastic Four and Spider-Man

1968
Martin Goodman sells Marvel to Perfect Film and Chemical Corp., which soon becomes Cadence Industries.

1970
Kirby leaves Marvel and signs a contract to write, draw and edit a series of titles for DC Comics. His last issue of "Fantastic Four" with Lee is No. 102.

1971
Receiving a request from the U.S. government, Stan writes a Spider-Man story that condemns drug use. The Comics Code Authority rejects the issue and Marvel publishes it without the code's seal as "The Amazing Spider-Man" No. 96-98, with art by Gil Kane. Its success prompts a major revision of the code.

1972
A "Marvel-ous Evening With Stan Lee" is presented Jan. 5 at Carnegie Hall.

Lee announces that he is being promoted to publisher and hands over day-to-day editorial and writing duties to Thomas.

1973
Lee narrates a segment of friend Alain Resnais' film "L'An 01."

1974
"Origins of Marvel Comics," first in a line of books reprinting classic Marvel stories with reminiscences by Lee, is published by Simon and Schuster.

1977
Lee and Kirby reunite for a Silver Surfer graphic novel, published in book form by Simon and Schuster. Lee and artist John Buscema publish "How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way."

Lee begins writing a Spider-Man comic strip, which still runs in newspapers.

1978
Marvel hits the small screen. A live-action "Spider-Man" series is short-lived, though "The Incredible Hulk," starring Bill Bixby and Lou Ferrigno, runs five seasons. TV movies featuring "Captain America" and "Doctor Strange" also are made.

1980
Lee and his wife move to Los Angeles so he can represent Marvel projects to Hollywood.

1981
A "Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends" animated series, with Lee narrating, appears on NBC Saturday mornings. It is joined shortly by a "Hulk" cartoon.

1986
Marvel's first major film, "Howard the Duck," based on a satirical 1970s cult comic written by Steve Gerber, is a B.O. and critical flop.
New World Pictures buys Marvel from Cadence.

1987
Lee presides at Spider-Man and Mary Jane's wedding before a New York Mets game June 5 in Shea Stadium to celebrate the characters' marriage in the newspaper strip and comicbooks.

1988
Lee and French artist Jean "Moebius" Giraud collaborate on two issues of Silver Surfer.

1989
Lee exec produces New World's film of "The Punisher," starring Dolph Lundgren, which goes straight to video. He also narrates a pilot for an "X-Men" animated TV pilot.

New World sells Marvel to financier Ron Perelman.

1991
Lee exec produces a "Captain America" film for New Line, starring Matt Salinger; it also goes direct to video. Marvel stock is offered for the first time on the New York Stock Exchange.

1992
An "X-Men" animated TV series launches on Fox, kicking off a number of new Marvel animated skeins through the 1990s including "Spider-Man," "Fantastic Four," "Iron Man" and "Hulk."

A low-budget "Fantastic Four" feature is produced by Roger Corman, but is never officially released.

1994
Kirby dies of heart failure at 76.

1995
Lee appears as himself in Kevin Smith's "Mallrats."

1996
Marvel, burdened with debt from overexpansion and declining comicbook sales, enters Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection.

1998
David Hasselhoff stars in a TV movie version of "Nick Fury: Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D."

"Blade," based on a supporting character from Marvel's 1970s "Tomb of Dracula" comicbook series, rakes in $70 million at the domestic B.O.

Marvel emerges from bankruptcy through a merger with Toy Biz.

Marvel signs a new contract with Lee, declaring him chairman emeritus and freeing him from his exclusivity with the company.

1998
Stan Lee Media, an Internet entertainment company, is formed.

2000
"X-Men," directed by Bryan Singer, debuts with a $57 million opening weekend and final domestic gross of $157.3 million.

Stan Lee Media ceases operations Dec. 15 after a rapid stock value decline.

2001
The Securities and Exchange Commission investigating Stan Lee Media's collapse indicts executives Peter Paul and Stephen Gordon; Lee is exonerated from any wrongdoing.

DC Comics begins a 12-issue comics series titled "Just Imagine Stan Lee Creating ..." that features Lee's take on DC characters such as Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman with top comic artists.

2002
"Spider-Man" feature is released to good reviews and earns $403 million at the domestic box office.

Lee files what he calls "the friendliest lawsuit in the world" against Marvel over differing interpretations of how much of Marvel's film and TV profits he is to be paid.

Lee and two partners form POW! Entertainment, an entertainment company independent of Marvel.

Animated series "Stan Lee's Stripperella" airs on Spike TV, with Pam Anderson voicing the lead role.

2003
Marvel swarms the box office with "Daredevil," "X2: X-Men United" and "Hulk," all exec produced by Lee. The combined domestic B.O. of the three films is $449.6 million.

2004
"The Punisher" is released in April, grossing $33.6 million domestically.

"Spider-Man 2" opens June 30, taking in a record $180 million its first six days in release.

IDT buys an interest in POW!
Compiled by Thomas J. Mclean